The Senate

Procedure Committee

Restructuring Question Time

Third report of 2008

November 2008

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PROCEDURE COMMITTEE

THIRD REPORT OF 2008

The committee reports to the Senate on the following matter that has been under consideration by the committee.

RESTRUCTURING QUESTION TIME

In its first report of 2008, the committee indicated that it has under consideration a proposal to restructure question time with the aim of making it a more effective mechanism for seeking the accountability of the executive government to the Parliament. The proposal was outlined in that report, with an indication that the allocation of questions under the proposal would be governed by informal agreements similar to those operating at present. The committee also indicated that it appreciated that the proposal would involve a major change to the operation of question time, and that the committee would consult with senators before making a recommendation.

Following that consultation, and discussions at some length in the committee, a majority of the committee has agreed to recommend to the Senate a trial, for the last two sitting weeks of this year, of a more limited change to question time. This modified proposal is as follows:

- no notice to be given of questions, as at present
- primary questions to be limited to one minute and the answers to them to two minutes
- two supplementary questions to be allowed to the questioner
- supplementary questions and the answers to them to be limited to one minute each
- answers to be required to be directly relevant to each question, as in the original proposal.

The committee therefore recommends that this report be adopted and the procedures as outlined operate as a temporary order for the two weeks of sittings beginning on 24 November 2008.

Alan Ferguson
Deputy President
and Chair of Committees
Chair of the Procedure Committee